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ABSTRACT

A practicum was designed to increase the number of primary teachers who possess a more current reading and writing philosophy and would implement theory-driven teaching practices. The problem addressed in the practicum was that primary reading and writing instruction did not reflect current research, theory, and practices. Many classroom teachers did not possess a reading philosophy, thus did not understand underlying teaching practices. A graduate level course was developed for teachers of primary grades kindergarten-3 that encourages teachers to form their reading/writing philosophy and implement theory-based teaching practices. Opportunities were provided to discuss current research, prevalent teaching models were demonstrated, and classroom visits were made to model teaching strategies and give feedback on strategies that teachers had implemented. Results of the practicum indicated that the number of primary teachers using current literacy theory and practices can be increased through teacher education, modeling, and feedback on teaching practices. Having a clearly defined reading philosophy enhanced teachers' practices and empowered them to select effective teaching practices that fit their students' needs. (A district mission statement and a reading philosophy rubric are appended; contains 20 references.) (Author/CR)

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Improving Primary Reading and Writing Instruction through a Uniquely Designed Early Literacy Graduate Course

by
Sylvia R. Lollis
Cluster 69

A Practicum I Report Presented to
the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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APPROVAL PAGE

This practicum took place as described.

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March 14, 1996
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This practicum report was submitted by Sylvia Lollis under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

March 30, 1996
Date of Final Approval of Report

William Anderson, Ph.D., Adviser

To my two favorite boys,

my husband, Jimmy,

and my dog, Herschel

Abstract

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The problem to be solved in the practicum was primary reading and writing instruction did not reflect current research, theory, and practices. Many classroom teachers did not possess a reading philosophy, therefore, they did not understand the whys underlying teaching practices. The goal was to increase the number of primary teachers who possessed a more current reading and writing philosophy and were implementing theory-driven teaching practices.

The writer developed a graduate level course for primary (K-3) teachers that encouraged teachers to develop their reading/writing philosophy and implement theory-based teaching practices. The writer provided opportunities to discuss current research, demonstrated prevalent teaching models, and made classroom visits to model teaching strategies and give feedback on strategies that teachers had implemented.

Results of the practicum indicated that the number of primary teachers using current literacy theory and practices can be increased through teacher education, modeling, and feedback on teaching practices. Having a clearly defined reading philosophy enhanced teachers' practices and empowered them to select effective teaching practices that fit their students' needs.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Description of Community

The setting for the practicum is a small urban school district in a southern state. Of the 46 counties in the state, this is the sixth largest county. The county is divided into five school districts containing a total of 47 public schools and 16 private schools. One of the county's most valuable assets is its two college-level facilities, a private four year college and a technical college. These two institutions had a combined enrollment of 6,327 students in the fall of 1994. Education statistics from the 1990 Census indicate that 64 percent of the county's residents (age 25 and above) had a minimum of a high school education, and almost 13 percent of the population had completed four or more years of college. In comparing these figures with those of the state, the county's residents have educational attainment levels that are just slightly below state levels (Knight, 1994).

The county's population is 149,872 and is evenly split between urban and rural areas. The population is 83% white, 16% black, .5% Spanish, and .5% are members of all other racial groups. Over the past twenty years, the county has joined several neighboring counties that have taken the leadership role in economic development in the state. More than $1.2 billion has been invested in new and expanding

firms since 1985, along with the creation of 8,090 jobs. With 652 new jobs created in 1993, the county ranked sixth in the state for job creation. Textiles are still important in the economy of the region, but the current industrial base is much broader and more diversified than in the past. Now employment is equally divided among manufacturing, trade, and services. The average median household income is $25,748 (Knight, 1994).

Description of Work Setting

The writer's work setting is the largest city in the county with a population of 30,000. The school district is comprised of nine elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. The district's student population is 10,860 with 4,983 elementary, 2,623 middle school, and 3,254 high school students. The student population consist of 88% white and 12% minority students. In 1994, two-thirds of all the district's high school graduates entered post-secondary education the following year (Knight, 1994).

The school district's mission is to "produce knowledge in graduates who are life-long learners, individuals of ethical character and citizens capable of contributing to an ever-changing global society by assuring quality improvement in every facet of school life, incorporating the resources and diversities of our community" (See School Mission, Appendix A).

Writer's Role

The writer is a Reading Recovery Teacher Leader and works with at-risk first graders in the Reading Recovery program. Reading Recovery is a short-term, early intervention program for at-risk first graders. Reading Recovery offers daily one-on-one, 30-minute tutorial sessions with highly trained teachers. This instructional approach helps students develop reading strategies, use cuing systems that good readers use, and develop a self-improving system for continued growth in reading. The goal is to accelerate poor readers so that they "catch up" to the average group in their first grade classroom as they become independent, problem-solving readers.

As a Reading Recovery Teacher Leader, the writer trains Reading Recovery teachers through a local university. She also supervises 56 trained Reading Recovery teachers in nine school districts, teaches students, interfaces with teachers, supports parents, and keeps administrators abreast of the effectiveness of their programs. To coordinate a program that is based on research, theory, and practice, it is the writer's obligation to present awareness sessions, workshops, teach gradate reading courses, and make presentations at local, state, and national reading conferences to build support and understanding for the Reading Recovery philosophy.

The writer coordinates the Reading Recovery program,

orders literature, supplies, texts, and interviews teachers for Reading Recovery positions. Other duties include conducting six Continuing Contact sessions for trained teachers, relaying information to out-of-district contact persons, and conducting workshops for parents, teachers, and support personnel. The writer also collects data and compiles a site report that includes quantitative and qualitative information that is disseminated to stakeholders and the National Diffusion Network.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

Problem Statement

The problem that was solved in this practicum was primary reading and writing instruction did not reflect current research, theory, and practices. Many classroom teachers did not possess a reading philosophy, therefore, they did not understand the whys underlying teaching practices.

Problem Description

As a Reading Recovery Teacher Leader, the writer had many opportunities to interface with classroom teachers. It was apparent through conversations with teachers, observations of classroom teaching practices, and assessment strategies used that a majority of teachers in the writer's district did not possess a reading philosophy. This lack of philosophy translated into very little or no knowledge regarding how young children learn to read and write. Therefore, many classroom teachers were not teaching children; they were teaching material. Without understanding the whys behind teaching practices, decisions were made based on the next skill in the teacher's edition of the basal or a commercially prepared set of units. Unfortunately, this type of lockstep teaching did not assess or meet students' individual needs by using their strengths to work on weaknesses. The student's needs should have driven instruction, not the resources.

The writer's school district had been moving toward whole language instruction for approximately seven years, but most teachers had not developed a reading theory to drive their classroom practices. The district had offered continuous staff development including free graduate classes, workshops, conferences, and experts to aid teachers in making this transition. However, most had dealt with practices, selection of literature, and assessment. Staff development had not included or centered around the change in or possession of the philosophy which must be in place to drive appropriate instructional practices. Therefore, the district had primary teachers who said they were teaching whole language, but they were continuing to use skillsheets, commercially prepared thematic units, or take trade books and basalize them by preparing skillsheets to go with them. This was the worst practice of all because students then began to dread reading good literature knowing that a plethora of worksheets would follow. This assessment existed because teachers continued to believe that reading ability equals successful completion of skillsheets. A solution to the problem had never been offered.

Problem Documentation

Evidence for the existence of this problem was supported by data collected from primary teachers regarding their theoretical orientation, written statements of reading philosophy, supportive classroom surveys, and

developmentally appropriate checklists. Using Diane Deford's (1985) Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP), teachers were asked to select the best answer that reflected their feelings about reading and reading instruction. The instrument used consisted of 28 statements and a five-point scale that reflected the instructor's strength of agreement or disagreement with the reading theory statement. The five-point scale ranged from one notating "strongly agree" and five denoting "strongly disagree". By analyzing this data, the primary teachers' answers indicated a decoding, skills, or whole language instructional orientation. Two sample statements included: "A child needs to be able to verbalize the rules of phonics in order to assure proficiency in processing new words. It is not necessary for a child to know the letters of the alphabet in order to learn to read" (DeFord, 1985). According to the writer's research, 24 of 25 primary teachers who completed the reading profile were classified as a skills teacher. This data had supported the writer's observations and conversations with other primary teachers in her district. Most teachers believed that reading depended on the development of skills.

As further evidence, when the same 25 teachers were asked to define their reading philosophy in a written statement, 23 teachers scored 3 or lower out of 5 points when their statements were scored using a rubric (see Appendix B). As shown in the previous evidence, primary

teachers included the sounding out words, knowing all of the phonics rules, and the importance of skills as the main foundations of their reading philosophy statements.

The third instrument used to determine philosophy was a ten question Supportive Classroom Survey. Twenty of the 25 teachers scored 60% or less when completing this classroom questionnaire. The results indicated that students spent as much as 75% of their time completing skillsheet activities. Most teachers noted that they never read the same book more than once and did not read aloud daily to their students. These practices mirrored their reading philosophies and beliefs.

The last measure used was a developmentally appropriate checklist that consisted of 80 statements that instructors checked if they agreed with the statement. Some sample statements included: "Children are assigned permanent desks and desks are seldom moved" and "Writing is taught as grammar and penmanship" (Senate Bill, 1994). Again when this checklist was administered to 25 primary teachers, 22 teachers scored 60% or less showing a lack of understanding of developmentally appropriate classroom practices.

These four pieces of evidence indicated that primary reading and writing instruction in the writer's district did not reflect current research, theory, and practices. In many instances teachers could not relate the connection between theory and classroom practices. Primary teachers had a very

difficult time discussing their reading philosophy because they had never been asked to reflect on their theory.

Causative Analysis

The were several causes for primary instructors teaching practices not reflecting current reading and writing philosophy. One primary cause was colleges and universities were not adequately preparing teachers in current theory. Many university professors were not in tune with current theories because they had not had recent classroom experience, engaged in current reading research, or reflected upon their own reading and writing philosophy. Some professors used outdated texts and purported antiquated teaching practices.

Another cause was a large number of classroom teachers were apathetic and did not realize that they needed to reflect upon their current theory and update or change it. Some instructors believed what they were doing was working and saw no need to change. Unfortunately, these teachers usually expected a number of students to fail each year; so why should they change? In other cases, teachers needed to realize the connection of philosophy and practice in order to embrace a current reading theory. Until they realized how theory informs instruction, they would continue to follow teachers' editions and be satisfied that they were doing a good job in the classroom. Basal companies drove classroom instruction in many instances.

The third cause was that staff development which included the connection between current theories and practices was nonexistent, expensive, or a one-shot experience. Many administrators did not realize the importance of continual staff development because theories and practices in reading and writing were constantly redefining themselves. It was clear that primary instructors, who were responsible for teaching young children how to read and write, had the most important job in schools; they unlocked a world of knowledge and enjoyment for a lifetime. When staff development was delivered, it was usually from a very expensive expert who no longer taught, or it may have been a one time workshop that occurred for two hours after school.

Finally, teachers needed the time to change, develop, or refine their philosophies; these changes do not happen overnight with one exposure. School districts and administrators, as a whole, did not support continuous staff development.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A review of the literature indicated the problem relating to the lack of current reading philosophy and teaching practices. Cambourne and Turbill reported that the depth of a teacher's literacy knowledge is reflected in her teaching practices (1994). Naturally it makes sense for teachers to stay informed of current research and theories

so that teaching practices can be the most current and meet students' needs. However, Pinnell and Matlin (1989) found that the majority of literacy practices are out of touch with current reading and writing philosophy. Tingley (1991) supported this finding stating that new teachers are insufficiently trained, and trained teachers still use outdated practices and learning theories. Consequently, Holdaway argued that children are failing due to the fact that teaching practices are not driven by sound literacy theories (1979). To understand the whys behind teaching practices it is imperative that educators understand the foundations of literacy. Then, and only then, can practices be aligned with students' individual needs.

The literature review consistently documented the problem regarding theory based instruction. Allington and Walmsley found that weak classroom instruction can be significantly improved through teacher literacy training. They state further that schools must change existing teaching practices to meet children's needs (1995). Urbanski (as cited in Allington & Walmsley, 1995) agreed that the problem is that schools have not changed over the years, but students' needs have changed tremendously. Literacy experts agree that teachers must understand current research before they can plan effective teaching strategies for their students (Newman, 1985). In-training teachers, as well as, trained teachers must continue to receive the latest

literacy training available to stay informed and updated so that they can continue to be the professionals they need to be.

A review of the literature revealed several causes for the lack of theory based classroom practices. Routman reported that one significant cause of the problem is the lack of continuous staff development for educators. Most staff development is an after school, one-shot experience without future follow-up. To make lasting changes, teachers must be supported with continual staff development (1988). Pinnell and Matlin (1989) agreed with Routman stating that change is an ongoing process that requires enough time, staff development, and funding to make the necessary changes. Research supports the belief that changing teachers' philosophies and teaching practices is a very difficult and extensive process (Cohen, McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). McCutcheon agrees that practice has always lagged behind theory, and the gap is getting alarmingly wider (as cited in Pinnell & Matlin, 1989).

Another issue involves the desire of educators to update and improve their literacy knowledge. Routman (1988) found that a majority of teachers are not informed and do not try to develop themselves professionally. Many teachers do not read professional journals and books, attend conferences, or participate in workshops or university literacy coursework. The relationship between theory and

practice is reported by Rosow. He found that teaching practices cannot change unless educators understand literacy theory (1995). Classroom practices must be driven by theory, and education is changing daily. Teachers must be aware of these changes in order to deliver the best possible instruction to students. This means that educators must strive to continually educate themselves and refine their teaching practices.

Cohen, McLaughlin, and Talbert (1993) reported that university personnel must be retrained in the latest research, theory, and practices in order to deliver the latest literacy knowledge to educators. Cruickshank (1990) found that the majority of teacher educators had not taught for some time, and their knowledge base was outdated. Darter supported this statement in his research finding that only 39% of the professors in his study had taught within the previous decade (as cited in Cruickshank, 1990). Universities and public schools are not communicating with and are not trusting each other (Tingley, 1991). This lack of communication translates into teachers being prepared by professors who are out of touch with the reality of the classroom. Many times teachers are then disillusioned and refuse to participate in future literacy coursework.

The writer believes that educators want to be respected professionals in their field. However, many do not realize the importance of theory-driven instruction or the vast

philosophical changes that are inevitable as our literacy research grows. Universities and public schools must encourage and support their educators as they continually improve themselves professionally.

Chapter III: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goals and Expectations

The writer's goal was to increase the number of primary teachers who possessed a more current reading and writing philosophy and implemented current teaching practices. It was the belief of this writer that comprehensive knowledge in early literacy research and philosophy would lead to effective teaching strategies that met individual student's needs.

Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for this practicum:

1. Using a profile that indicates reading theory orientation (TORP), there will be an increase of 20 points in 18 of the 25 teachers polled to show a shift towards a whole language perspective.

2. Eighteen of the 25 teachers polled will be able to define in a written statement, with a minimum sore of 4 out of 5 points, a current theory of reading and writing.

3. Using a supportive classroom survey, 18 of the 25 teachers polled will answer 8 out of the 10 questions correctly indicating that they have an understanding of the characteristics of a supportive classroom.

4. When given a developmentally appropriate checklist, 18 of the 25 teachers polled will answer 56 of the 80 questions correctly.

5. All of the 25 primary teachers involved will develop and implement a reading, writing, and alphabet or word analysis project that links with current literacy research, theory, and practice.

Measurement of Outcomes

Measurement of Outcome 1: Using a theoretical profile, there will be an increase of 20 points in 18 of the 25 teachers polled. The writer will administer the TORP as a pretest at the beginning of the practicum implementation. The same instrument will be readministered as a posttest at the end of the practicum. The results of the pre and posttest will be analyzed. This instrument enabled the writer to determine the reading theory that each participant embraced at the beginning of the practicum and the theoretical shifts that occurred as a result of the graduate reading course.

Measurement of Outcome 2: Eighteen of the 25 teachers polled will be able to define in a written statement, with a minimum score of 4 out of 5 points, a current theory of reading and writing. At the end of the implementation of the practicum, primary teachers were asked to define their theory of reading. When these definitions were scored using a five-point rubric, the results enabled the writer to specifically analyze the components of each teachers' theory of reading.

Measurement of Outcome 3: Using a supportive classroom survey, 18 of the 25 teachers polled will answer 8 out of 10 questions correctly. At the end of the practicum, the primary teachers involved in the practicum completed a 10 question supportive classroom survey. The surveys allowed the writer to determine each teacher's idea of the most effective and supportive physical setting for their language arts classroom.

Measurement of Outcome 4: Using a developmentally appropriate checklist, 18 of the 25 teachers will answer 56 of the 80 questions correctly. At the end of the practicum, the participants completed a developmentally appropriate checklist. The measurement was used to assess how teachers' reading theories translated into actual teaching practices.

Measurement of Outcome 5: All of the 25 teachers involved in the practicum will develop and implement a reading, writing, alphabet or word analysis project that links with current literacy research, theory, and practice. At the end of the practicum, the teachers made three presentations that provided the writer with evidence that each teacher appropriately implemented current reading and writing practices into their classrooms.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

Statement of the Problem

Primary reading and writing instruction did not reflect current research, theory, and practices. The primary teachers in the writer's school district needed a literacy theory to drive their instructional practices.

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The literature reviewed supported one basic solution to the specific problem of classroom instruction that is not theory driven. Many literacy experts (Routman, 1988; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Woods, 1988) agreed that the most obvious solution is that educators must have a sound understanding of theory and research. From theory, beliefs, and attitudes, teaching practices naturally follow. Pinnell and Matlin (1989) reported that when teachers are familiar with current research, this knowledge informs their development of appropriate literacy experiences. Researchers (Strickland & Morrow, 1990; Pinnell & Matlin, 1989; Cambourne & Turbill, 1990) agreed that knowledge and understanding of philosophy empowers teachers to know the "whys" behind their practices. Then teachers can make wise teaching decisions when they can apply current learning theory (Routman, 1994). Cunningham and Allington (1994) found that current knowledge translates into quality education.

Most teachers want to deliver the most effective

instruction to their students. However, educators, for the most part, do not understand theory and how it should drive classroom instruction. Teachers search for the right practice, which became a game of hit and miss. With research and theory to guide educators' practices, teaching would be more effective and efficient.

To educate teachers, Pinnell and Matlin (1989) recommend that research, theory, and practice must be a part of all preservice and inservice teacher education. Rosow agrees that universities must model theoretically sound practices for teachers (1995). Tingley (1991) suggests that universities and schools should collaboratively plan teacher training programs together so that teachers will benefit from theory and practice.

Teachers must continue to develop their theory as they engage in the cycle of action, reflective thinking, and continual change (Strickland & Morrow, 1989). Anderson, Hierbert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1995) agree that teaching is a complex profession that must include lifelong learning and constant renewal as information changes rapidly. Pinnell and Matlin recognize that continual staff development for trained teachers is a commitment that every school system must support (1989). It seemed Plato summed it up best, "those who dare to teach should never cease to learn" (n.d.).

As a result of reviewing the literature, the writer

generated several ideas regarding primary teachers implementing current teaching practices which reflected the latest reading and writing research and theory. First, the writer developed a graduate reading course for primary teachers that addressed the problem. The writer found adequate funding so that the course was offered free to primary teachers in her district. The writer believed that by educating teachers in the latest reading/writing theory and research, teachers would have the base knowledge to choose or create the best possible strategy that meets each student's needs. With this knowledge, teachers would understand the whys behind their teaching practices. Then instruction would be driven by theory, not by a basal company or the hit-or-miss technique. The writer believed that this approach would work because many classroom teachers were eager to improve their reading knowledge and classroom practices. However, many were disillusioned by the current courses that were offered by a nearby university. Also, teachers respected the writer because she taught children and was close to the problem. Unfortunately, most university professors have not taught recently, and teachers did not trust their expertise.

Description of Selected Solution

The writer chose to develop and teach a K-3 literacy class that was offered free for three hours graduate credit through a local university. Support and financial funding

was offered by several administrators in the writer's district office.

To change teaching practices, teachers must first be familiar with current research and theories. As part of the class requirement, teachers read current research, studied, and reflected on their own theories and teaching practices.

Also, prevalent teaching models were explored through reading, discussion, videotaped lessons, and demonstrations with small groups of students. As part of the assessment for the class, each student implemented a current reading practice, writing strategy, and a word analysis or alphabet activity that is related to current theory. To document their theoretical shift, each classmember presented each of the three required projects to the class during the last two class meeting dates.

During and after the literacy course, the writer made classroom visits to teachers to model prevailing teaching strategies and provided feedback regarding classroom application of current theories. These activities assured appropriate, long-term implementation.

Upon completion of the implementation, the procedures and outcomes were shared with district office administrators, principals, and staff development committee members. A course description, syllabus, and participant feedback was disseminated. The results of collegial visits were evaluated, and strategy modeling sessions were

discussed. Follow-up sessions for future classes were proposed, and the possibility of developing a companion course for elementary level (4-6) teachers was discussed. Another logical outgrowth was the establishment of school or district-wide whole language focus groups. These steps insured continual followup and staff development for the participants and any others who are interested.

Report of Action Taken

Before the Early Literacy class began, the writer secured monies from the district staff development fund. Then a request was made to teach a contract course through a local university and the writer sent a copy of the syllabus to the head of the education department. The writer ordered the texts for the class, Don Holdaway's Foundations of Education and Regie Routman's Invitations. These materials were also free to class participants and were paid for with the same staff development funds. The writer's supervisors committed to releasing funds for this project and any subsequent follow-up.

During the first month of the implementation period, the Emergent Literacy class met for the first date at a local elementary school. All 25 participants attended that first class meeting. The class began with introductions, distribution and explanation of the course syllabus, and course requirements. The two previously mentioned texts were distributed, and each teacher completed the TORP. The

pretest instrument was collected and was not discussed. The writer would later score and analyze the TORP for future use. Next, teachers wrote their definitions of reading, and each was shared as the instructor wrote descriptors on the overhead. Then a foreign language tradebook activity was used to elicit the strategies that young readers would use to "read" when they encountered unfamiliar texts. A discussion of the complexity of the reading process evolved. Then Marie Clay, Don Holdaway, and Regie Routman's definitions of reading were explored. The class ended with reading assignments for the next week's class.

The second class began with an introduction and description of Marie Clay's Observation Survey. The first five subtests were discussed in depth, including their administration, scoring, and analysis.

The next class meeting focused on the sixth subtest, taking a running record of text reading. A one and a half hour running record training audiotape was used to teach the participants how to code a running record. To practice this skill, each teacher was required to take a running record on one of their students and bring it to the next class meeting for analysis.

Our third class finished our running record training with an additional audiotaped practice session that involved coding a basal story. The scoring, analysis, and application of running records ended our discussion. Teachers paired off

to discuss and analyze the running records that they had taken of their own students. This was followed by a time for questions and further analysis of effective classroom uses.

The first month ended with an introduction, discussion, and modeling of Dr. Marie Clay's strategic reading prompts. Clips of a Reading Recovery student involved in a lesson were used to provide examples of each strategy. Attention was directed toward the effective use of teacher prompts in teaching problem-solving strategies to develop independent readers and writers. Handouts provided examples of prompts used to develop each early and higher level strategy. This week's assignment was to view a Reading Recovery lesson in each teacher's respective school and to write down observations that would be used to begin our next session. Reading assignments were outlined in the syllabus.

The second month began with a discussion of different theories of learning. Cambourne, Halliday, Vygotsky, Luria, and Clay's theories were among those discussed. Historical viewpoints and current practices were examined. Examples of Primer, the look-and-say method, linguistic readers, and other current trends were examined. The class ended with four teachers volunteering for classroom visits by the writer. These visits were used to give feedback on implementation, model teaching methods, and/or make suggestions for classroom practices.

Our sixth class began with information processing and its link to Luria's theory. Also, the reading theories of Clay, Holdaway, Strickland, Goodman, and Routman were discussed. It was during this class that and interest was shown in Pat Cunningham's four reading blocks. The writer decided to include this in future discussions after purchasing her book, Classrooms That Work: They Can All Read And Write. The writer's supervisors agreed that the purchase of a copy of the Cunningham's book would be a wise investment, and money was released for this purpose.

The next class began with a discussion of the importance of literacy learning before school and the importance of the bedtime story and reading aloud to children. Jim Trelease's Read Aloud Handbook and several parenting efforts were discussed, including Even Start. A balanced reading program was introduced with a Wright Group video that focused on shared reading and writing. Four more teachers volunteered for classroom visits that the writer made during the following week.

The third month began with an examination of guided and independent reading and writing by viewing other Wright Group videos. Application and implementation issues were discussed. Classroom visits were discussed, and other students planned for their visit by the writer. Cunningham's book was distributed and reading assignments made.

During our next class session, Cunningham's four block model was outlined and examined. Many teachers expressed a desire to gradually implement the model into their language arts class. Also, teachers were interested in having future workshops or visiting on-site to see the model in progress. This possibility was investigated, and administrators plan for Dottie Hall, the principal of Clemmons Elementary, to present a series of workshops for our teachers. In addition, groups of teachers will make visits to Clemmons to see the teaching model.

The next class session was devoted to the developmental stages of reading, writing, and spelling. Four teachers asked the writer to visit their classroom during their language arts block.

The third month ended with Clay's hearing sounds in words and word analysis theory. Elkonin's contribution to this process were discussed. Classroom application and implementation were examined.

The fourth month began with a focus on reading and writing assessment and evaluation. Portfolio inclusions were discussed using Leanna Traill's book, Highlight My Strengths. Classroom environment and management practices completed our discussion on emergent reading and writing. The final four classroom visits were arranged for the following week.

During the next two class meetings, teachers began their reading, writing, and alphabet or word analysis project presentations. Each presentation was examined as it reflected a change in theory and practice. During the last meeting, the TORP, a Developmentally Appropriate Checklist, and classroom survey was completed by each classmember. Also, participants described their reading philosophy with a prepared written statement.

After completion of the Emergent Literacy course, grades were compiled and sent to the university. The evaluation results were reviewed with administrators and supervisors, and plans for future classes were proposed.

Chapter V: Results

Results

In the writer's district, the problem was that primary reading and writing instruction did not reflect current research, theory, and practices. Most teachers did not possess a reading philosophy, therefore, classroom teaching practices and ultimately assessment were driven by our basal's teacher edition. Student needs were not driving instruction, but rather the resources. Therefore, the writer's goal was to increase the number of primary teachers who possess a more current reading and writing philosophy and implement more current teaching practices in their classrooms. With this goal in mind, the writer developed a graduate level emergent literacy course that had as its focus research, theory, and philosophy that naturally lead to effective teaching practices.

1. Using a profile that indicates reading theory orientation (TORP), there will be an increase of 20 points in 18 of the 25 teachers polled to show a shift towards a whole language perspective.

This outcome was met.

Using the TORP as a pre- and posttest, 23 of the 25 teachers increased their scores by 20 points or more at the conclusion of the graduate course.

2. Eighteen of the 25 teachers polled will be able to define in a written statement, with a minimum score of 4 out

of 5 points, a current theory of reading and writing.

This outcome was met.

Twenty-three of the 25 teachers scored 4 points or more when their reading philosophy was scored using a 5-point rubric. Eighteen teachers scored 4 points rating their reading knowledge base at above average knowledge, and five teachers scored 5 points, excellent knowledge. The two teachers who did not meet the outcome scored 3 points, average knowledge.

3. Using a supportive classroom survey, 18 of the 25 teachers polled will answer 8 out of the 10 questions correctly indicating that they have an understanding of the characteristics of a supportive classroom.

This outcome was met.

Twenty-five of the 25 teachers answered 8 or more of the 10 questions correctly on the supportive classroom survey. Three teachers answered 9 questions correctly, and 22 teachers answered all 10 questions correctly.

4. When a developmentally appropriate checklist, 18 of the 25 teachers polled will answer 56 of the 80 questions correctly.

This outcome was met.

Twenty-three of the 25 teachers answered 56 or more of the 80 questions on the developmentally appropriate checklist. The range of correct answered were 60 to 80

questions correct. The two participants who did not meet the outcome scored 53 and 55.

5. Twenty-five of the 25 primary teachers involved will develop and implement a reading, writing, and alphabet or word analysis project that links with current literacy research, theory, and practice.

This outcome was met.

All 25 of the primary teachers who participated in the class successfully developed and implemented each of the three required projects. According to the evidence that the teachers presented in their projects, every participant had effectively implemented a new teaching strategy or practice into their language arts block.

Discussion

After reviewing the goal, expected outcomes, and results of the practicum, the writer concluded that the number of primary teachers who now possessed a reading philosophy and could implement current practices had been increased. This practicum had a positive impact on the lives of many individuals: teachers, students, parents, and administrators. Teachers described their teaching experience as more enjoyable, productive and satisfying experience for themselves and their students. The shift in their reading philosophy was evident in the way they spoke about reading, their profession, and children. Several teachers revealed that they "never really understood how young children

learned how to read and write until taking the course". Now, they say that they know how to teach students. Many educators felt inspired and revitalized with their newfound knowledge, and stated that "they couldn't wait to get to school each day to teach their students". Their knowledge base empowered them to choose what their class, small group, or individual student needed, and now they could fit the appropriate practice to the need. This finding agrees with the research of Allington, Walmsley, and Newman. They agree that teachers must understand current research before they can plan effective teaching strategies (1995; 1985).

Administrators acknowledged that their faculty members were excited about teaching again, and several principals have encouraged the writer to teach the course again. Also, several administrators, including principals, assistant principals, and Title I Reading Coordinator, plan to take the course in the future. This interest is evidence that the practicum was effective, and that the best way to change teachers' philosophies is to give them long-term support. As Routman (1988) found one-shot workshops can not have the impact that this 15-week course had.

Another important, unexpected outgrowth of this course was the interest in the Pat Cunningham teaching model. Due to the interest, the writer added this to her syllabus. Teachers became so involved with this model that they asked for, and received, additional presentations and modeling

with children by Dottie Hall who helped Cunningham develop the model. In addition, several visits were scheduled to Clemmons Elementary to see the model in progress. Three of our elementary schools have had several teachers implementing the model, and one has bought Cunningham's book, Classrooms That Work, for her entire faculty. This interest has prompted the writer and two other administrators to write a grant to fund further implementation in one of our elementary schools. This will allow for the time, money, and support that teachers need to make effective change. This need for long-term support is documented by Cohen, McLaughlin, Talbert, Pinnell, Matlin, and others (1993; 1989).

The on-site visits to teacher classrooms were also very effective in causing change. Teachers want and need supportive feedback on their actual teaching practices. Contract visits made by principals usually turn into "dog and pony shows" without any substantial feedback, just checks offs on a district form. After the visit, each teacher and the writer planned a meeting to debrief the visit to gain insights into the whys underlying teaching approaches. These collegial visits offer open, two-way communication that could be used as a valuable tool in improving the teaching profession.

In summary, teachers can make the needed changes that on-going literacy research demands of them. However, they

must be supported by enough time, education, and financial and moral support to make theoretical shifts that impact their daily teaching practices. Encouraging teachers to understand current theory leads to an overall increase in the effectiveness of literacy instruction in our classrooms and thus, the literacy gains made by their students.

Recommendations

The writer believes that strong literacy instruction comes from educators who are well-informed regarding the latest reading theory and current practices. Therefore, educators and administrators must share the goal of on-going staff development, renewal, and education to assure that professionals are equipped with the latest theory and practice in literacy instruction.

The following recommendations are suggested to increase the use of current, theory-driven practices in literacy:

1. Plan on-going staff development for trained teachers in the form of theory/practice based graduate courses, year-long, school-based staff development, literacy experts, and financial and moral support by administrators during this growth period.
2. Plan for collegial visits by "master teachers" to give feedback regarding teaching practices or demonstrate new techniques for teachers. Visit classrooms or schools that have innovative practices.

3. Be open to new ideas and interests of educators. Listen and everyone will benefit.

4. Administrators are the instructional leaders of their schools. They should research and investigate the latest literacy theory and practices, and encourage their faculty to read journals or books that keep them informed.

5. Develop a professional library in each school so teachers will have access to professional journals and books.

6. Be creative in securing needed materials, speakers, or staff development funds needed to make change. Monies can be received through state and federal grants, businesses, fundraisers, and local staff development funds.

7. Encourage teachers to attend professional conferences to hear experts or colleagues in the field of literacy.

Dissemination

Results of the practicum have been discussed with the district's language arts coordinator, elementary and middle school supervisor, and academic restructuring director. Due to the demand for and interest in the class, there are plans for the writer to teach the Emergent Literacy course again for teachers in her district. Staff development funds will be used to fund the course so that it will be free for district teachers.

The writer was asked to share the results of the practicum at the district's elementary principals' meeting. Copies of the course syllabus were distributed, and one

school is planning to write a grant to fund the course exclusively for its faculty members.

Word of mouth has spread facts regarding the success of the practicum and three surrounding districts have contacted the writer about teaching the course for their teachers. The writer plans to further disseminate the practicum by way of the practicum report, after its approval.

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APPENDIX A

DISTRICT MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the school district is to produce knowledge in graduates who are life-long learners, individuals of ethical, character and citizens capable of contributing to an ever-changing global society by assuring quality improvement in every facet of school life, incorporating the resources and diversities of our community.

APPENDIX B

READING PHILOSOPHY RUBRIC

Using Clay's definition of reading as an examplary defintion, the student's definition would be evaluated using the rubric listed below. One point would be given for each descriptor included in the student's definition.

> I define reading as a message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practised. My definition states that within the directional constraints of the printer's code, language and visual perception responses are purposely directed by the reader in some integrated way to the problem of extracting meaning from cues in a text, in sequence, so that the reader brings a maximum of understanding to the author's message (Clay, 1991).

READING THEORY KNOWLEDGE BASE

0	1	2	3	4	5
No	Little	Some	Average	Above Average	Excellent

BEST COPY AVAILABLE